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Drinking ❁ ❁ amongst Women.

BY

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Drinking Amongst Women.



It is, I fear, true that drunkenness has lately increased among English women ; and not only among those of them who are dwellers in the slums, but also among the well-to-do and the wealthy. To protect the latter from this scourge, education, healthy homes, and abundant recreation have done but little. Even among the religious classes — at any rate, among the church-going classes—intemperance, as is well-known to the initiated, has many victims. Indeed, in regard to this vice the women of Great Britain, of all social grades and of all degrees of culture, have a bad pre-eminence among the English-speaking women of the world. In the United States and

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Canada intoxication among women is comparatively rare. In Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand the condition of women as regards this vice is far better than it is with us in England. Here police statistics give a very inadequate idea of the extent and virulence of this all-pervading evil. It is true that of the total number of persons arrested for drunkenness in this country, women constitute rather less than a third, but in that third few save the abandoned women of the street, and others belonging to the "submerged" sections of the female population are included. Of the women drunkards, belonging to the working class and the middle and upper class, very few ever see the interior of a police-court. It is secret drinking that is their scourge, and it is a terrible scourge.

There is a startling contrast between the condition of English women and that of Scandinavian women, especially in Sweden and Norway, in the matter of drunkenness. Among the women of these two countries there is hardly any public drunkenness at all. In hard-drinking Gothenburg, for example, of what we may call police-court drunkenness, official statistics

show that just about forty times as much takes place among men as among women ; and in the rural districts of both Sweden and Norway drunkenness of this class among women is all but unheard of. How to account for this marvellous state of matters I do not know. I do not think that law can have much to do with it. In this country it is customary to attribute female intemperance almost exclusively to what are called Grocers' Licenses ; yet in Gothenburg, and indeed generally in Scandinavia, Grocers' Licenses form a far larger proportion of all licenses than the same class of licenses do in England ; and yet, in spite of this fact, the women there and throughout Scandinavia generally, are exceedingly temperate. The truth is that while, in this country, licenses of this order constitute a real and substantial evil, they do not account for more than a small part of the intoxication, and intemperance short of intoxication, which degrade and destroy so many of our women. Neither the lower nor the higher classes are much affected by these licenses. Indeed, they are little used save by a section of the middle classes. They constitute only about five per

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cent. of the total number of licenses in existence, and the volume of alcohol of which they are the channels is far too small to account for the terrible curse of women's drunkenness from which the nation suffers.

It is to something more deep-reaching and much less manageable than Grocers' Licenses—bad as these are—that we owe this curse. Our fathers eat sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge. Women's minds have been poisoned by the false teaching of men whom they trusted—whom they could hardly avoid trusting—and we are reaping the evil harvest of their blundering. Here are the outlines of the story.

Some forty or forty-five years ago, the doctors "went clean off their heads" on the question of the employment of alcohol as a medicine, as well as a cordial and as a food. Sir William Gull, in his evidence before the Lords' Committee on Intemperance, thus states the case, so far as the use of alcoholic liquors as a medicine is concerned:—"Forty years ago, wine was moderately used, and so was brandy. Then there came a change—owing chiefly, I think, to the School of King's

College, headed by Dr. Todd. His theory was that diseases were chiefly due to debility, and required alcohol almost universally. Formerly, diseases were divided into two classes—viz., phlogistic and anti-phlogistic. Dr. Todd's theory was that all diseases were weak or anti-phlogistic, and his treatment therefore was always with brandy; or, at least, I should say almost universally, in cases of acute disease. Since that time there has been a great change."

It would be difficult to exaggerate the evil effects of the teaching of Dr. Todd and his school. For a time it dominated the minds of a large proportion of the medical men of England. The medical men thus dominated were for years practically missionaries for the diffusion of false beliefs as to the medicinal and dietetic value of alcoholic liquors, as well as active promoters of habits of excessive drinking. They planted false beliefs in people's minds, and diseased appetites in their bodies. Their intentions were honest enough. What they did was what they believed to be for the best; but, I insist, so far as their actual influence on the beliefs and health of the

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people was concerned, they might just as well have been honoured and trusted missionaries for the establishment and development of habits of intoxication among the people. From day to day, from week to week, year in and year out, they went from house to house on their pernicious mission. The majority of their victims were women and girls, who, much more than men and boys, are subject to "diseases of debility," which, according to the prevailing doctrine, "required alcohol almost universally." When a young woman—or, indeed, a woman of any age—felt "low," or "out of sorts," some kind of alcoholic liquor was almost invariably prescribed. The kinds of liquor used ranged from beer to brandy, pretty much according to the social status of the invalid. The middle and upper classes had claret or sherry, and now and again port; and, if they were rich, champagne. The working classes had beer and stout, with spirits to taste. The result, of course, was, that tippling, in addition to that which was ordered, became very common. In fact, to the teaching and practice of Dr. Todd and his school, far more than to anything else, the

intemperance of the women of this country, which at present is so much commented upon and deplored, was attributable. Often great crimes have been done in the name of liberty, and oftener, I think, great follies have been perpetrated in the name of science. At any rate, for well nigh thirty years the influence of the doctors, as a class—all of them men of science—was the chief obstacle to the Temperance Reformation, especially among women. But they were *not all alike*. It is hardly needful to say that during all this period many individual medical men aided the Temperance Reformation with wisdom and energy, and did so at great self-sacrifice. And now, in daily increasing numbers, they are stepping out to the front as the most trusted and capable leaders of the people in the fight against what Sir Andrew Clark stigmatised as “The Enemy of the Race.” But it is just, and it is necessary, that those who were responsible for the maintenance of the curse of the liquor traffic for so long a period and in such strength; should be held responsible for the immeasurable evil which they have caused.

It is said that misfortunes never come singly,

and it is sadly certain that, at the time in question, the misfortune brought on the nation by a misled medical profession did not come alone. At the time when the doctors had led large masses of the people to adopt opinions and habits highly favourable to the promotion of intemperance, the Legislature passed a law which supplemented the evil that the doctors had done. They enacted the measure known and execrated as Mr. Gladstone's Grocers' Bill. That law came into full operation in the early sixties. It was, it is probably needless to say, advocated as usual as a measure of Temperance reform, but, of course, of judicious—extremely judicious—Temperance reform. The “extreme and injudicious Temperance men and women” opposed it with all their might. But it had the benediction of “practical” people; and the Temperance “fanatics” were, as usual, denounced for their perversity and unwisdom. The *Times* summed up its idea of the position in the terse saying that the measure was opposed by rogues and fools. It is to-day held, especially among “moderate” reformers, that this measure is an almost unmitigated curse, and that the first step in practical Tem-

perance reform would be the abolition of Grocers' Licenses. And it is true it placed enormously increased temptations directly in the path of just those persons who, in the special circumstances of the time, were most liable to fall into such temptation as the licensed grocers offered. All this goes to confirm the truth and to show the importance of the old saying—

“The evil that men do lives after them.”

The false teachers of the generation of Dr. Todd have passed away, but their pernicious doctrines still continue to blight the lives of tens of thousands of men and women—especially of women—who never have even heard the names of their misleaders. These misleaders knew not what they did. They doubtless meant well, which was a good thing for themselves—for their own minds and hearts. But it makes no jot or tittle of difference to the effect of their teaching. The laws of nature are inflexible, inexorable. If we break them they punish us, altogether regardless of the character or motives of those who taught or induced us to do so. If the most tender and loving mother mistakenly gives her child

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deadly poison instead of a healing medicine, the child will be saved no physical pang—no danger to health or life, because of the excellence of the mother's intentions. "Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." Whatsoever a nation or society soweth that also shall it reap. The whole of that tremendous mass of sin and folly and misery which our drinking customs have brought upon us is the product of false teaching, erroneous beliefs, weak self-indulgence. And *our* experience of the effects of the general use of alcohol is identical with the experience of the race. In all parts of the world—throughout all ages known to history—the habitual beverage-use of alcoholic liquors has been accompanied by just such miseries as those from which *we* suffer to-day. But our fathers erred in this matter mainly through ignorance. We have no such excuse. And if we continue in the same dangerous path, we shall do so in spite of knowledge. We now know that there is no *need* for the maintenance of our drinking customs. This our fathers and grandfathers did not know. They believed that the use of alcohol was essential to health. We know that

total abstinence is essential to health. The evidence of life-assurance associations and benefit societies, as well as the experience of our soldiers and sailors, together with the sifted and tested results of scientific research, puts this beyond question. Such being the case the responsibility of Christian men and women of to-day with respect to the continuation of the drink evil is greater than the responsibility of Christians of any former age; and those who do not qualify themselves by a thorough study of the facts and principles of the Temperance Reformation to take an effective part in ridding the nation of a curse which the nation has brought upon itself, shirk an obvious and pressing duty. To stand aside from such a work and to leave it to others is in a high degree unchristian. The best Christian should be the most perfect citizen. If we *forbear* to deliver those who are drawn unto death and those that are ready to be slain, if we say, "Behold, I knew it not," doth not He that honoureth the heart consider it?

Who are the British Women?

They are a band of total abstainers, 100,000 strong, and wholly unsectarian. They seek by individual and united action to influence public opinion, to lessen drinking facilities, and especially to counteract the terrible growth of drinking amongst women. Convinced that intoxicating drink is by far the most prolific cause of social sin and misery, and knowing that intemperance has of late years increased far more rapidly amongst women than amongst men, the "British Women" have banded themselves together for the active promotion of Temperance principles; and they cordially invite and welcome the help of all who will join them by becoming abstainers and taking part in the work of the Association.

For the sake of the thousands who suffer so terribly from the results of intemperance, will you not join our ranks in trying to lift the burden from many darkened homes, and so win from the Master's lips the approving words, "INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME"?

SIGN THE PLEDGE.

I Promise, by Divine assistance, to abstain from all Intoxicating Drinks, and to try to induce others to do the same.

Signed

Address

.....

Date I.....

JOIN THE ASSOCIATION.

All women who have signed the Total Abstinence Pledge are cordially invited to become Members of the Society. Sign this Form, and enclose a subscription—any sum ~~from 1s. upwards~~ per year.

Signed

Address

.....

Date I.....

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